

# A REPORT TO THE 34<sup>th</sup> DISTRICT



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- Education, *Vice Chair*
- State Government
- Agriculture and  
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February 2004

Dear neighbor,

I hope you and your loved ones are starting the year with high spirits and in good health. It is a true privilege to represent you in Olympia. Once again we're all geared-up to achieve results during this 60-day Legislative Session.

As always, my work will reflect our community's concerns. Among the most pressing issues we'll be facing are creating jobs, insuring we give children a better future, and making health care affordable and available for everybody.

We have to make intelligent investments in education in order to produce world-class professionals. Education and jobs are tied together; it's mighty difficult to have one without the other. The future belongs to today's kids, but it's up to us to put them on the right track and provide them with the necessary resources.

We need to expand job training, reduce class size, give schools more options by re-shaping the school levy system, and change the state's Learning Assistance Program funding model so that students can focus on learning.

I want to take this opportunity to wish you the very best this New Year and let you know how much I truly appreciate your letters, e-mails and telephone communication. Please continue to stay in touch with your comments and questions.

Sincerely,

Joe McDermott  
State Representative

## **It's Primarily about Primaries Presidential Preference Primary Suspended**

As you know, in a special Legislative Session held in December, we agreed to cancel our state's 2004 presidential primary. The reason was obvious: neither major party would have paid much attention to the results. By canceling it, we saved almost \$7 million.

In this election year Democrats are using the February 7<sup>th</sup> precinct caucus meetings to begin selecting our presidential candidate, and Republicans have no contest for their nomination. It doesn't make sense for Washington taxpayers to pay \$7 million to stage a fruitless presidential primary. I want to make sure you know that calling off the 2004 primary is a one-time deal — Washington state's presidential primary is in place for the 2008 election.

## **Blanket Primary Ruled Unconstitutional**

Separate from the Presidential Preference Primary, for nearly 70 years Washington state has used a September Blanket Primary to nominate candidates from the major political parties to move on to the November General Election ballot.

In 2000 the political parties sued to end use of the Blanket Primary, as the Blanket Primary allowed people to vote for a party's nominee regardless of whether or not they were a member of that party. A federal-court panel this past September declared the present system unconstitutional — and the full 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals refused to consider the question. Right now, we're waiting for word from the United States Supreme Court about our state's appeal of that recent lower-court ruling. Given the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in a similar case in 2000, it is unlikely that they will hear this case. If they don't, Washington will be without a primary. Obviously we need to do something to solve this dilemma.

The Legislature is beginning now to consider the options for replacing the Blanket Primary. As a member of the State Government Committee, I am very involved in these discussions. At issue are such considerations as whether voters can vote for candidates of either party and, if they are limited to just candidates from their party, if their choice of a party is made public. You will hear of our work on this issue as the Legislative Session progresses.

## **The Budget**

Last year we adopted a two-year budget. This session we'll write a much smaller, supplemental budget to reflect changes in the economy since last spring. But it will still be tough. The supplemental budget will have to provide funding for higher than expected K-12 enrollments, prison populations, and General Assistance caseloads. We will also need to find funding to pay for fighting fires last summer, and to fund the collective bargaining agreement for homecare workers.

## **Education**

If we want to be generous to kids, the one gift they won't outgrow is a good, solid education. But it takes a lot of work to create world-class public schools in Washington State. Some of us have made a serious commitment to this cause and are making reforms that redefine what it means to be a successful learner.



Over the past ten years of education reform, schools statewide have shown much progress, but there's still a long way to go. We must focus our attention on addressing the complex issues that face our state – eliminating the achievement gap between students of various racial groups; getting all students to meet the academic standards set forth in the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) as measured by the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL); and providing a public school funding system that is ample, flexible, stable, equitable, straightforward, and accountable.

## ***The WASL***

This session I'll continue working on reforming the Washington Assessment of Student Learning and graduation requirements. Specific changes include:

- Certificate of Mastery required for graduation beginning in 2008
- Certificate of Mastery earned by passing the WASL in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics in 2008 and adding Science in 2010
- Authorizing retake opportunities and alternative assessments
- A student plan that outlines high school graduation requirements; first plan required in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and updated thereafter
- Voluntary assessments in social studies, arts, and health and fitness



## ***The Learning Assistance Program (LAP)***

The Learning Assistance Program was created to assist underachieving students who need additional support in reading, mathematics, writing, or in the readiness skills associated with those subjects. Currently, additional funding is provided to schools with low test scores. When their test scores improve, the funding is discontinued and their test scores decline again.

I will continue to advance the reforms I introduced last session to allocate LAP funds based on poverty instead of test scores. This will end the cycle of decline with the loss of funding, and research shows that the schools with low test scores also have high concentrations of students in poverty. This funding will also have additional accountability associated with it to ensure success.

## ***Jobs, jobs, jobs!***

I am committed to work on helping small businesses succeed; making government more efficient and responsible; and encouraging investments in renewable energy to enhance economic development.



Fighting for your families' future by forging a partnership with businesses, government and families is a priority. We need to make sure Washington is the best place to work and raise a family. A top-notch education system will keep the state's competitive edge and will create more good paying jobs with benefits to make Washington workers competitive in a global economy.

We are promoting business investment in our economy and creating more good paying jobs with benefits by building on success in Washington's high-tech industry. We'll consider tax breaks for businesses willing to invest in rural communities to create jobs throughout Washington. Measures that provide a net positive economic effect for the state will benefit us all and earn my support.

**Representative**

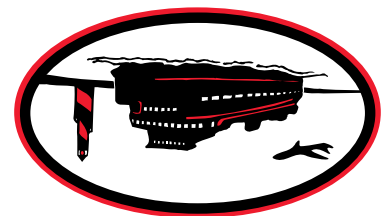
**Joe McDermott**

## Protecting the Public from Secondhand Smoke

Since I wrote about this issue in my last newsletter, the Tacoma Pierce County Board of Health has instituted a smoking ban in all public places, including restaurants, bars, taverns and bowling alleys. I will continue to pursue a statewide ban so all employees are protected and smoking policies are uniform across the state. The dangers of secondhand smoke become more and more clear every day. Waitresses are more than three times more likely to die from lung cancer, and 2.5 times more likely to die from heart disease, as women in other occupations.

While I respect the right of adults to smoke despite the health risks, no one has a right to make other people breathe their deadly smoke — especially when the U.S. Surgeon General warns *there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke*.

Smoking has been banned in most workplaces in Washington for ten years. All employees deserve the same protection in their places of employment, so I am fighting to ban smoking in all indoor public places, including restaurants, bars, taverns, and bowling alleys. I am encouraged, as scientific and economic studies have demonstrated conclusively that smoke-free ordinances and statutes have had no negative impact on business of restaurants or bars wherever enacted. It's time for the Legislature to act, and to save lives.



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